



**The Canadian**  
*Chamber of Commerce*  
in Hong Kong

# YOUNG PROFESSIONALS JOURNALS

VOLUME 2

THE CANADIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN HONG KONG

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAMBER

As a facilitator of professional development, networking and advocacy, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong is proud to present the YPC Journals by the Young Professionals Committee. This journal series will explore timely issues relevant to the development of young leaders in Hong Kong. While focused from the perspective of young professionals, the topics explored will resonate across industries, borders and generations. We hope these journals will facilitate broader discourse on how to best build up future generations for an inclusive, sustainable and prosperous society.

## MESSAGE FROM THE YPC CO-CHAIRS

CanCham's Young Professionals Committee is involved with professional development seminars, events with a social cause and networking activities – such as the annual Mentorship Program. To stay up to date with events or to get involved, join our [mailing list](#) or follow us on [Facebook](#).



**YVONNE LAU**



**NIKI LEUNG**

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
CAREERS IN THE  
INDO-PACIFIC:  
THE JOB SEARCH FOR  
YOUNG PROFESSIONALS**

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## THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS LANDSCAPE IN ASIA

The global economy, apart from the 2008 financial crisis, has enjoyed recent decades of stability and prosperity. This flourishing period allowed for unprecedented development and growth in the Indo-Pacific region – with Asian countries rapidly modernizing and challenging developed markets for recruiting global talent.

Regional developments are also assuming a greater importance on a global scale; notably, the rise of China and India, the growth of Southeast Asian economies, and Singapore’s rising status as an international economic hub. Undeniably, the regional international relations (IR) job market has become more significant and competitive.<sup>i</sup> As such, an increasing number of young professionals are pursuing IR jobs and are turning to the Indo-Pacific as a unique region in which to develop their careers.

**“The need for topic and country experts has spurred greater competition to meet challenges and demands for increasing IR sophistication in the region.”**

IR professionals historically pursued careers in foreign ministries. Academic institutions, western think tanks and multilateral organizations (such as the United Nations and its affiliated groups) were common landing spots. The enhancement of trade flows resulting from increased globalization has turned regional economies into key

global linkages. Thus, an increasing suite of multinational firms and organizations are now building IR teams. These include large corporates spanning a diverse array of industries such as investment banks, consultancies and pharmaceutical firms; or smaller companies with boutique offerings such as think tanks, risk and intelligence advisories, and regional trade organizations.

The need for topic and country experts has spurred greater competition to meet challenges and demands for increasing IR sophistication in the region. As regional issues have become global, the Indo-Pacific plays a more important role on the world stage, and IR professionals must upskill to stay relevant.

As international disputes continue to play out in the Indo-Pacific, including conflicts in the South China Sea,<sup>ii</sup> a regional cybersecurity arms race,<sup>iii</sup> and economies being forced to choose between aligning with China or the US,<sup>v</sup> could the need for IR professionals throughout different sectors in Asia-Pacific increase?

**“Could the need for IR professionals throughout different sectors in Asia-Pacific increase?”**

In this second edition of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce’s Young Professionals Journals, we spoke with two young IR professionals who successfully transitioned from Canada and the UK to work in Hong Kong.



## **DAN WARELIS**

Senior Manager, Public Policy, Asia Pacific  
HSBC

Dan's role is to actively identify and respond to policy issues that may impact the bank and its customers. This includes issues related to financial crime, financial regulations, data privacy and sustainable finance. His previous role was Head of Government and Industry Affairs, Asia-Pacific for Refinitiv; and he also worked for Global Affairs Canada and Standards Council of Canada. Dan is actively engaged in policy discussions with industry associations across the financial community in Asia-Pacific. He came to Hong Kong from Ottawa, Ontario in 2017.

### **Finding an IR job in Hong Kong**

"Searching for a job anywhere is likely to be difficult and Hong Kong is no exception. Outlining and reviewing goals such as targeting a number of coffee chats and job applications per week helped to keep me on track with my search and gave me a sense of progression.

Using LinkedIn and my existing network, I sought out introductions to people working in the field I wanted to enter; and actively asked friends to facilitate introductions where possible. Not long after arriving in Hong Kong, I joined CanChamHK and found it to be a welcoming community that allowed me to learn more about the business environment in the city and get a better handle on how I could be more targeted in my search. After five months of actively searching and networking in Hong Kong I signed onto a new role."

### **Valuable skills when working in IR in Asia-Pacific**

"Beyond the usual importance of clear communication and critical thinking capabilities, professionals working in public policy and international affairs in 2020 must be adaptable and comfortable with ongoing change. The issues that were critical five years ago are different to what is considered critical now. A willingness to dive in and learn about new subjects is integral to the job. That applies whether you want to move within an organisation or move to another company."

### **Advice for young IR professionals searching for work in Asia-Pacific**

"Identify areas you are interested in and seek out as many ways to expose yourself to those areas. For instance, this could mean volunteering for CanChamHK committees or other NGOs, requesting a new project at work, or arranging coffee meetings with people who work in your fields of interest. These are ways to explore subject matters that interest you. The goal is to develop a deeper understanding of the type of work involved, obtain experience discussing and thinking about the subject, and learn what the job may entail."

### **How Covid-19 has impacted your work**

"As governments and businesses have had to work closely together, the main shift in my work has been towards identifying and explaining what government actions in response to the crisis may mean economically and commercially. These are unprecedented times and relevant policy analysis is critical as businesses navigate the current environment."

### **The role for IR professionals long-term in Asia-Pacific**

"Given the current geopolitical environment, understanding the effects of public policy and how governments interact with the private sector is more important than ever. I believe there are increasing opportunities for IR professionals in Hong Kong and across Asia in a variety of fields. Individuals who can translate the impacts of emerging policy and regulatory issues for businesses, such as climate change, data flows and new technologies, will be in high demand."



#### **JOHN MARRETT**

Country Risk Service Manager, Asia  
The Economist Intelligence Unit

John's research interests include cross-strait relations, tourism development, migration patterns and aging populations in East Asia. His regular responsibilities are policy analysis and macroeconomic forecasting for Taiwan, as well as producing large custom research projects for government clients on a diverse array of topics such as cross-strait relations, the Southbound Policy and cost-of-living in Taiwanese cities. John came to Hong Kong from London, England in 2017.

### **Finding an IR job in Hong Kong**

"I transferred to Hong Kong from London with the Economist Group. I was originally hired with the group in 2015 in London, shortly after I had moved back from a stint in Beijing. I felt lucky to have gotten the job without having existing contacts in the company. I transferred to Hong Kong from the London office shortly thereafter."

### **Valuable skills when working in IR in Asia-Pacific**

"Two things come to mind. First, attending a reputable university and obtaining a relevant education in IR – Asia-Pacific in particular, will provide a strong foundation for working in the region. Second, networking is crucial in order to understand and find relevant opportunities of interest."

### **Advice for young IR professionals searching for work in Asia-Pacific**

"My advice would be to seek out and engage small international firms in emerging economies in Asia-Pacific with both part-time and full-time vacancies. These organizations may be growing and establishing their footprint, and would be an

excellent place to start out in the region.

Alternatively, I would apply to internships with relevant regional organizations. For native speakers of certain languages, you can supplement your salary by teaching on the side. Make sure to learn as much of the language in the country you are based in at the same time.”

### **How Covid-19 has impacted your work**

“My work has been busy due to wide-ranging revisions to macro and policy forecasts for all countries resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. I have had to spend more time validating the quality of work and assumptions for other team members as the economic situation has changed rapidly. The ability to work from home has allowed me to be flexible during these unpredictable times.”

### **The role for IR professionals long-term in Asia-Pacific**

“While there may be more opportunities for IR professionals in multinational companies, I think economic issues resulting from over-crowding and the current pandemic may force smaller organizations to freeze hiring or let go of staff.”

### **Future of work for IR professionals in Asia-Pacific**

“There has never been a better time to pursue a profession in IR. Both in terms of increasing subject matter to take an interest in as well as the amount of organizations to work for; opportunities abound for those looking to work in the IR field in Asia-Pacific. Challenges remain, however, as the resulting economic recession from Covid-19 may force some organizations to scale down their IR teams or withdraw from the region altogether.”

## **TOP TIPS FOR YOUNG IR PROFESSIONALS**

- Network, network, network. It is important to identify your goals and seek out as many informational meetings as possible with those working in your desired field.
- Craft your interest area(s) within IR. Learn as much as you can and ask questions regarding your topic(s) of interest when meeting with others.
- Do not be afraid to put yourself out there. Volunteer with local Chambers and their respective committees, such as CanChamHK’s Policy & Government Relations Committee. Engage with relevant networking groups, and utilize LinkedIn to find IR events, conferences and webinars.
- Be flexible. COVID-19 has forced organizations and individuals to be adaptable in order to work effectively during uncertain times.

i. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/09/the-rise-of-asias-think-tanks/>  
ii. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3093724/vietnam-takes-more-assertive-approach-south-china-sea-beijing>  
iii. <https://www.scmp.com/business/companies/article/3046215/cybersecurity-among-leading-concerns-asia-pacific-businesses>  
iv. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2020-06-04/lee-hsien-loong-endangered-asian-century>



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